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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: EFFICIENCY TRUMPS POLITICS IN VENEZUELA'S BOLIVAR STATE

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR REASONS 1.4 (d)

Summary

[¶1.](#) (C) Both sides in the race for governor of Bolivar State are confident their candidate will be elected in the regional elections on October 31. Efficiency, rather than politics, is the main theme in the campaign, and both campaigns hope to draw supporters away from their opponent. The GoV wants to defeat a former Chavista, and to control this important industrial area. In conversations with PolOff the sides agreed that Gov. Antonio Rojas Suarez has been an effective administrator, and that Gen. Fernando Rangel Gomez, the Chavista candidate, has been an effective leader of the Corporacion Venezolana de Guayana, the state owned industrial giant of the region. Regional newspapers are split in their predictions. End Summary.

Rojas Suarez Optimistic

[¶2.](#) (C) PolOff spoke with Bolivar State Governor Antonio Rojas Suarez, and State Secretary General Waldo Jose Negron October 25. Rojas said that, based on daily tracking polls the tendency in favor of his reelection is irreversible. He would not specify numbers, but explained that he expected significant support from Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) members and other backers of President Hugo Chavez. Negron noted that Rojas Suarez had been the president of the state MVR until his 2003 break with Chavez. He also said the MVR is divided in Puerto Ordaz, the largest city in the region, because the current MVR mayor is running for reelection without the party's support. Rojas Suarez said Chavista support for Rojas Suarez would help offset the effect of abstention among hard core opposition supporters.

[¶3.](#) (C) Rojas Suarez said his administration had achievements to back up his campaign for reelection, including building 50 schools, renovating 160, creating an integrated emergency dispatch system, a trauma hospital and a virtual library. Asked where the resources came from for all the projects, the Governor complained about central government disbursement delays, but noted that funds eventually arrive. He said that to get the payments, governors have worked arrangements with local banks.

[¶4.](#) (C) Rojas Suarez said many voting centers in Bolivar were manual, due to their isolation, and that he had a strong lead in these districts. As for the electronic voting centers, he said he had "heard" that the people in the barrios were going to demand that the voting boxes be opened. He stressed that in contrast to the recall referendum, the regional elections have a law that specifically refers to counting the votes publicly.

Maisanta

[¶5.](#) (C) Marco Rojas (a cousin of the Governor) of Chavez' Comando Maisanta campaign, told PolOff October 26 that Gen. Francisco Rangel Gomez was leading 57% to 31% over Rojas. He dismissed the support Rojas could expect among Chavista voters as "insignificant", while pointing to significant support for Rangel among businessmen in Bolivar. He asserted that as head of the Corporacion Venezolana de Guayana (CVG), Rangel had had extensive dealings with the business community, which was now translating into political support. Marco Rojas said the Governor had done a good job, but had been unwilling to work with the CVG and the central government, even before breaking with Chavez. He said Bolivar State would develop faster with three forces (state government, municipal government, and CVG) pushing in the same direction.

[¶6.](#) (C) Marco Rojas told PolOff that the Maisanta campaign

was trying to prevent abstention, to give the elections legitimacy. He said they would work with the opposition to allay any suspicions, but only under the orders of the National Electoral Council (CNE). They would not support or allow the opening of all the voting boxes, alleging that it

would take too much time, though he suggested that the two sides could reach an agreement on election day on which boxes to open. (Note: CNE rules do not allow for this.)

Local Press POV

17. (C) Robinson Lizano, editor of the conservative *Correo del Caroni*, told PolOff October 25 that independent polls show Rojas Suarez with 26-7% of the vote, Rangel with 22-3%, and two other opposition candidates with 8% and 6% respectively. He said the campaign was between two leaders with good administrative records. Lizano noted that Rangel, while president of the CVG, had failed to solve Puerto Ordaz' serious water problems, which are the responsibility of CVG, and that this could hurt him in the election. He said the issue of Rojas Suarez' break with Chavez has not been major campaign issues. Chavez, Lizano said, also forgave Rojas Suarez after April 2002, and continued to work with him until 12003. Lizano alleged that Rangel was shamelessly using CVG resources to finance his campaign.

18. (C) Lizano said no leaders in the region had called for abstention. Anecdotal evidence, however, indicated it would be very high among the middle and upper classes of Puerto Ordaz, he said. Among the reporters on his staff, he estimated 20 of 25 would not vote. Lizano estimated that abstention would be near the traditional 40%. He said the two military leaders in the state, National Guard CORE 8 Commander Gen. Alberto Betencourt Nieves, and 5th Jungle Division Commander Gen. Wilhelm Beccerra, were strong Chavez supporters, who would not hesitate to favor the Chavista candidate any way they could. He said there were divisions in Chavismo in the region, in part over the substitution of the MVR candidate for mayor of Puerto Ordaz for a PPT candidate and over a fight for control of some unions in CVG, which might favor Chavista dissidents crossing over to Rojas Suarez..

19. (C) Gerardo Gonzalez, head editor of the *Nueva Prensa de Guayana*, told PolOff October 25 that he believed the Chavista candidates would win the elections as a result of the high opposition abstention. He said the Rojas Suarez government has a good reputation among Chavistas, while Rangel has the support of 40,000 employees of CVG who experienced his successful management, and the association with Chavez. Gonzalez said that the people of Bolivar State have learned that you get more resources if you are with the GOV, than if you are against it.

Comment

10. (C) Bolivar State seems unusually blessed to have two good managers to chose from on October 31. As one would expect in a regional election, many local factors will play important roles in this race, including water, past achievements, and party divisions. Despite complaints about fraud in the recall referendum, Rojas Suarez talked about the race in normal and political terms. He seems confident that the electoral law gives the opposition much greater control than during the referendum. Rangel, for his part, is not a politician, and seems to have been chosen as a trustworthy stand-in for Chavez. That, and his record at CVG, make him a formidable challenger for a successful opposition governor. The key to the race will be whether Rojas Suarez can peel away enough Chavista support to offset middle class abstention.
Brownfield

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